

REMARKS

On January 8, 2004, Applicants transmitted to the Office a preliminary amendment that amended claims 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 13, cancelled claims 2, 4 and 5, and added new claims 18-21. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office acknowledged the receipt of the preliminary amendment on January 8, 2004. Applicants can submit a copy of the return receipt if requested by the Office.

On April 22, 2004, Applicants received a non-final Office Action which was mailed on April 20, 2004. The Office Action stated that it was in response to the communication filed on November 13, 2003 (the filing date of the application). Accordingly, the Office Action of April 20, 2004 did not consider the preliminary amendment of January 8, 2004.

On April 29, 2004, Applicants' representative spoke with Examiner Sterling (the Examiner responsible for this application) regarding this matter. The following is a summary of the discussion which took place.

Since a response to the outstanding Office Action is required, and a substantive response would be fruitless based on the circumstances, the Examiner suggested that Applicants respond to the outstanding Office Action by: 1) conveying in the response the circumstances surrounding this matter, 2) noting Applicants' telephone conference with the Examiner on April 29, 2004, and 3) reiterating in the response the Examiner's assurances that the next Office Action would be a non-final Office Action.

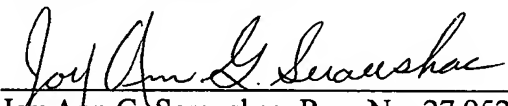
Applicants' respectfully submit that points 1 and 2 of the above have been satisfied by Applicants preceding remarks. Also, Applicants respectfully remind the Examiner of the Examiner's assurances regarding the non-finality of the next Office Action.

CONCLUSION

Applicants respectfully submit that Applicants preceding remarks are fully responsive to the Office Action of April 20, 2004 in view of the current circumstances surrounding the application.

Therefore, in view of the foregoing remarks, Applicants respectfully submit that all of the claims in the application are in allowable form and that that application is now in condition for allowance. If, however, any outstanding issues remain, Applicants urge the Patent Office to telephone Applicants' representative so that the same may be resolved and the application expedited to issue. Applicants request the Patent Office to indicate all claims as allowable and to pass the application to issue.

Respectfully submitted,


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